

# Preparing Air Defenders for the Combat Advisor Mission

By CPT Cory N. Scott, ADA

**H**aving recently returned from a tour in Iraq as a staff/maneuver advisor on a battalion military transition team (MiTT), I can attest to the steep learning curve for Air Defenders in terms of the nontraditional Air Defense Artillery (ADA) “bread and butter” skills required of combat advisors. Now, as commander of an observer/controller company at Fort Riley, Kansas, that trains combat advisors, I see a cultural transformation that quickly is legitimizing the advisor mission—not only to Iraq and Afghanistan, but in general—as an enduring mission for our Army as part of what General John P. Abizaid described as “the long war.”

Air Defenders can expect transition team assignments to become part of a standard career progression (at least for junior officers and some NCOs) with the shortage of eligible Army personnel to fill the ranks.

To understand how to prepare for 60 days of advisor training at Fort Riley—and for spending a year overseas as an advisor—it is critical to understand what the combat advisor mission and the Fort Riley training mission specifically entail.

**The Combat Advisor Mission Defined.** The combat advisor mission requires US officers and NCOs to teach, coach and mentor host nation (HN) security force counterparts. This enables the rapid development of our counterparts’ leadership capabilities; helps develop command and control (C<sup>2</sup>) and operational capabilities at every echelon; allows direct access to Coalition Forces (CF) enablers to enhance HN security force counterinsurgency (COIN) operations; and incorporates CF lethal and nonlethal effects on the battlefield.

**Leadership.** The rapid development of leadership capability relies heavily on our ability as combat advisors to teach, coach and mentor the commanders and staff officers in our counterpart units. Combat advisors should not try to “build American units.” Instead they should rely heavily on their own leadership and staff experiences and knowledge to coax the HN counterparts in a positive direction toward mission accomplishment and independence from CF support.

Leveraging individual and collective combat skills at the tactical level sets the example for the HN unit during operations and develops the unit via a “train-the-trainer” approach. How-

SFC Jay Carey, 0832 Military Transition Team, 3rd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, gives instructions as Iraqi Army soldiers from the 2nd Light Infantry Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division, practice searching a detainee in Al Wehda, Iraq, 12 February. (Photo by SGT Timothy Kingston, Joint Combat Camera Center)

ever, attempting to lead counterpart units outright is a poor tactic and even could get advisors killed—in extreme scenarios—if the rapport with the HN’s unit leadership is damaged.

Leadership encompasses a complex expanse of various components, all of which contribute to leadership style and organizational success. By approaching HN unit leadership development from a more rudimentary perspective, combat advisors will enjoy greater levels of success.

**COIN.** A more basic approach is also advantageous for developing C<sup>2</sup> and operational capabilities at each echelon. While teaching staff fundamentals, keep in mind that combat advisors are not part of the HN unit staff. Coach *them* to create, develop and implement their own systems and products, allowing them to do the work themselves. Recommend good ideas until “blue in the face,” but if your counterparts don’t like the suggestions, don’t take it personally.

As in our Army, “bootlegging” is okay when it comes to developing organizational C<sup>2</sup> and operational capability. If a centralized and approved doctrine exists within the counterpart unit’s organization, then learn it and attempt to teach, coach and mentor the HN unit staff sections based on that doctrine. This helps standardize the entire force. To improve any doctrinal shortcomings, coach the counterparts to make recommendations to their higher headquarters like we do in our own Army. Ideally, this will help teach them to become a learning organization.

Once your counterparts grasp the basic integrated staff concepts, push to incorporate ideas from the US Army’s COIN doctrine (*Field Manual [FM] 3-24 Counterinsurgency*). Develop and follow a methodology similar to the one outlined in Figure 1 to progress toward HN security force independence. Keeping your counterparts’ capabilities in mind, infuse COIN doctrine early so it is engrained in everything they do as a unit.

COIN operations can become resource-intensive, and HN units do not always have access to the same pools of money or technological assets that our American line units enjoy. As a combat advisor, you give your counterparts the opportunity to access these enablers, enhancing their ability to conduct COIN through partnering with CF units and as leverage to influence HN unit leadership actions indirectly. For example, transition teams can certify team personnel with the Commander’s Emergency Response Program

(CERP) to involve and empower their HN leadership in the process of allocating money for local projects that will improve their communities.

Though CERP funds come from American units, HN security forces reap the benefits by interacting with the local leadership and citizens to decide how the money is used. This increases the public perception of the HN security forces’ competence and power. The combat advisor gain influence with the HN forces through these processes.

Likewise, advisors can enhance their relationship with local CF units by permitting the CF to leverage HN human intelligence and the “collective face” of HN security forces on operations. In the COIN environment, these “commodities” could be the advisors’ two biggest advantages in facilitating partnership between HN units and the CF units operating in the same areas of operations (AOs). They also may be the only methods for leveraging the CF support a team needs to sustain itself on the battlefield.

**Effects.** Other types of support the HN units and the transition teams need from CF come in the forms of both lethal and nonlethal effects. These are the final pieces to the advisor mission, and it can make or break the transition team experience. When coaching the host nation counterparts to request and integrate these effects into the planning cycle, point out that the earlier the effects are requested the better.

The team’s own survivability on the battlefield may hinge on the ability to call for close combat attack (CCA) or close air support (CAS). As the advisors, and potentially the only American ground forces in the AO, mastering the capability to validate legitimate military targets while simultaneously identifying the second- and third-order effects of prosecuting those targets for your HN unit leadership on the ground is a must. No advisor, no bomb.

Calling for CCA or CAS is one example of a battlefield task that an advisor might have to execute without the help of Field Artil-

lery brethren. Typically, the transition teams will have the military occupational specialties (MOS) needed to complete the advisory mission, though teams currently are resourced on an *ad hoc* basis with some personnel filling positions outside their MOS. Air Defenders typically fill “branch immaterial” positions but could fill the fire support officer position on a transition team.

**Composition.** While the composition of the transition team will depend on the team type and final destination, the typical structure of a transition team consists of 11 to 15 officers and NCOs, generally mirroring what would be expected on an American Army line unit staff. Because of the “top heavy” composition, combat advisors also can expect to perform some traditional duties of junior Soldiers (driver, gunner, etc.) for mounted combat operations. Junior enlisted Soldiers are not organic to transition teams unless the team is lucky enough to negotiate augmentation from its local American unit.

While always challenging combat advisors mentally, the mission will be physically challenging due to this inherent team composition. The Fort Riley training helps focus the necessary mental and physical advisory battlefield skills.

**Training Mission Defined.** While Air Defenders are very good at adapting to a changing air picture or air threat, we also are proving our ability to adapt to “needs of the Army” missions like a transition team assignment.

**Preparation.** The ADA Captain’s Career Course currently incorporates a discussion panel of former Air Defense combat advisors assigned to Fort Bliss, Texas, so students have the opportunity to interface with subject matter experts. This is a huge first step toward adapting to the complex, unforgiving and ever-changing environments we will continue to serve in around the world.

Air Defenders also can participate in a two- to three-week course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to get additional training to fill the fire support officer positions on transition teams (see Page 22 of this edition).

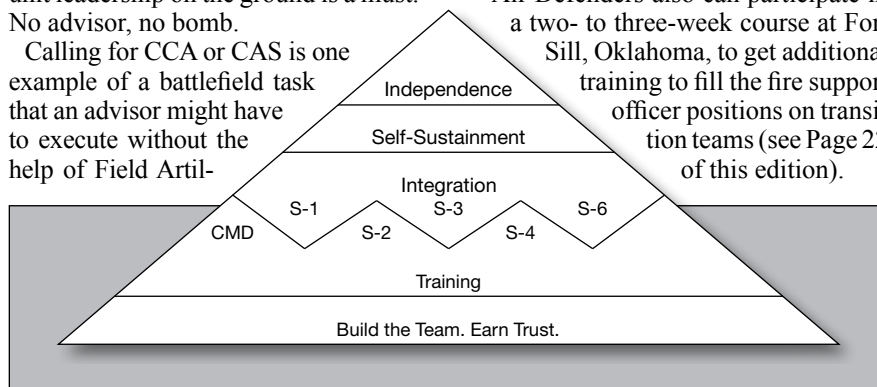


Figure 1: The “Pyramid” Concept as an Advisory Strategy



The 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, at Fort Riley has established a Directorate of Cultural Influence and Counterinsurgency that is responsible for training the most essential pieces of the combat advisor mission: COIN, culture, history and language. Through this directorate's continually-improving curriculum, the ADA School can enhance its own curriculum for teaching COIN to junior officers. Integrating a more robust COIN curriculum will give Air Defenders the knowledge base needed to prepare better for the combat advisor mission as well as other missions encountered as part of global COIN endeavors. It certainly will prepare Air Defenders for success during the 60-day training model at Fort Riley.

*Fort Riley.* The Fort Riley training mission follows a standardized and ever-evolving model of training six days per week during a 60-day period. Students in-process, draw personal and team equipment, work through the training model, conduct a final training exercise to validate their teams as a whole, graduate and deploy in less than three months from start to finish. Based on the combat advisor mission description, the training builds around the various competencies that will contribute to success during

execution of the advisory effort. Mastery (or at least a general understanding) of the advisor core competencies will increase the graduates' odds of becoming "effective" advisors while deployed.

The first part of training focuses on culture, history and advisory skills with an initial dose of exposure to pertinent language skills needed as an advisor. As a combat advisor teaches, coaches and mentors his counterpart, knowledge of the counterpart's culture and language bolsters the relationship between the two parties and helps the advisor understand why the counterpart thinks the way he does. By knowing and speaking a few simple words and phrases in the native tongue, the advisor will impact the rapport-building process.

Establishing this bond as a working friendship is paramount and largely will determine the level of success when it comes to advising respective staff sections. Additionally, an understanding of the indigenous language, history and culture serves advisors well while traversing the neighborhoods and/or countryside of their particular AO. The ability to interact with the local populous on a more personal level will pay dividends for teams and their counterpart units in terms of earning the trust and confidence of the local populous. The local leaders and citizens undoubtedly will associate you, as the advisor, with the HN unit.

However, by trying to cram too much language and culture into a short period of time—such as a 60-day training model—likely will result in retaining less. Get online once you have identified what kind of team you are assigned to and download computer software to begin the exposure process. The Army offers *Rosetta Stone* language software via Army e-Learning accessible through Army Knowledge Online, or you can download the actual language software in use at Fort Riley from <http://www.tacticallanguage.com>.

Developing language skills and knowledge of culture and history are vital to the advisor mission, but understanding COIN arguably is the most critical. Basic COIN training is part of the standardized push from Fort Riley.

The ultimate goal as a combat advisor is to "work yourself out of a job." To do that, the HN unit must understand how to conduct independent security operations. *FM 3-24* is your COIN "bible." The interest our COIN doctrine has elicited worldwide makes it imperative that US military and government personnel are

familiar with its contents.

Throughout the Fort Riley training, you will have the opportunity to develop and apply advisory skills and COIN knowledge. Through a series of approximately 10 leader engagements, you will meet with foreign-language-speaking role players to work through mostly nonconfrontational scenarios in various settings. Regardless of team-type, these experiences can be transposed to fit the whole host of possible situations combat advisors will face in theater. Team members not directly involved in the leader engagements still should pay attention to mannerisms, the sequence of events, how to use interpreters and the role of the advisor in the process.

Along with interspersed leader engagements that will challenge you to apply your knowledge of culture, language, history and COIN, the traditional individual and collective combat skills comprise the majority of the rest of the schedule. These training events challenge you to create and refine a team tactical standing operating procedures (TACSOP). Placing increased emphasis on establishing team operating norms at Fort Riley will allow the team to focus more on the advisory effort beginning with the first day in theater.

If you can make contact with the team you are replacing, ask for a copy of its current TACSOP. Make use of limited spare time on the training calendar to build, improve upon and rehearse the playbook of battle drills and team tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs).

*Time.* Unfortunately, time is our enemy when it comes to training advisors. The Fort Riley training mission puts officers and NCOs (to include Air Force and Navy personnel) through a rigorous training curriculum, and that curriculum is evolving continuously. But let's be honest; 60 days of immersion training is only "just good enough."

Prepare to "drink from the fire hydrant" as an individual and as a team while progressing toward validation, graduation and deployment. Despite our efforts to train teams sufficiently, advisors still do a lot of learning once deployed. This is due partially to the uniqueness of each AO (even within the respective theaters of operation), the distinctive identities of each respective host unit and the individual personalities of counterparts. To help diminish the two to three month period of "figuring out your job" as a new combat advisor, there are resources you can familiarize yourself with before arriving at Fort Riley (see Figure 3).

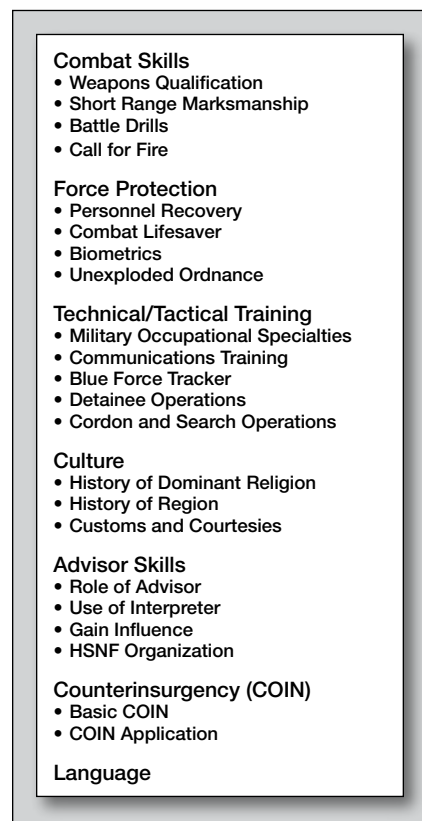


Figure 2: The advisor core competencies focus the Fort Riley training mission training model.

**Recommended Preparation for Training.** With the immense availability of related articles, books and professional feedback, it is easy to get bogged down in the COIN learning process. The resources listed in Figure 3 largely are derived from the reading list in *FM 3-24* and will help in understanding COIN and the combat advisor mission as they pertain to both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Besides adding a steady diet of reading material, you can and should seek out former combat advisors, not only in the Air Defense community, but in other branches. Keep in mind when conversing with former advisors that every experience is unique; however, many of the experiences are transposable to situations most combat advisors will face while deployed.

The Combat Advisor Handbook (08-21) is another valuable resource that the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) recently produced. Developed at Fort Riley, the handbook is a compilation of chapters written entirely by former combat advisors. It is a monumental step toward developing advisor doctrine and institutionalizing the combat advisor mission. As a timely, professional document, it will help prepare you for your future assignment.

**Air Defense and the Future of Advising.** Training and deployment as a transition team member develops Soldiers professionally in ways you never could have imagined. If nothing else, the advisor mission will teach many lessons in patience. Potentially, advisors live in some of the most austere environments on this planet, serving in a capacity you likely never could have predicted. Embrace the role as an element of one of the most important missions our nation could ask a Soldier to assume. Interestingly enough, there are some tiebacks to the Air Defense community.

**Experience Benefits.** First, the mission affords us the experience of operating in a small-team environment—a structure we currently use and will continue to use as members of Patriot crews, air defense and airspace management cells, ground-based midcourse defense crews and as staff members.

Second, the mission exposes us to parts of the Army we normally do not get the chance to work with (or are not accustomed to working with) on the battlefield, such as civil affairs, psychological operations teams, and operational line units. As a result, we learn more about our Army

Figure 3: Recommended Reading

- *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency* (Washington DC: US Army).
- David Galula. *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (London: Praeger), 1964. (Lessons Derived from the Author's Observation of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Greece, China and Algeria)
- Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston, editors. *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing), 2008. (13 authors examine the development and practice of counterinsurgency doctrine from the beginning of the 20th century to the Iraq conflict.)
- George Packer. *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 2005. (A journalist for The New Yorker talks to Iraqis and Americans about Operation Iraqi Freedom.)
- Thomas Ricks. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. (New York: The Penguin Press), 2006. (A Definitive Account of the American Military's Tragic Experience in Iraq)
- Bing West. *The Village*. (New York: Pocket Books), 1972. (A First-Person Account of Military Advisors Embedded with Vietnamese Units)

as an organization, how we fit in to the bigger picture as Air Defenders and how we can make our Army better.

Third, as our allies field new air defense technologies and capabilities under the auspices of our guidance, we will work closely with them to help develop unified doctrine and TTPs. Former advisors will have the skill sets to teach, coach and mentor allies in these undertakings.

Lastly, the mission shapes us into more well-rounded officers and NCOs by exposing us to COIN doctrine, cultures, histories and languages that otherwise we might not make the time to study. These are skills we likely will need in the Air Defense community as our current jihadist adversaries become more sophisticated on the asymmetric battlefield with their potential abilities to employ aerospace technologies against us and our allies.

**Career Benefits.** In terms of career implications and progression, the transition team assignment does not have negative repercussions. There is a temporary combat advisor additional skill identifier undergoing the permanent approval process. Human Resources Command incorporated the mission as part of the key developmental time for majors in conjunction with S3 and executive officer time and team chiefs for brigade and higher teams and equivalent echelons now are centrally selected. There are initiatives to create a combat advisor tab and to develop special duty assignment pay for returning advisors to serve as cadre to train new advisors. The concept of a permanent "Advisor Corps" currently is undergoing debate at the highest echelons of our military.

The combat advisor mission is a significant part of our exit strategies for both Iraq and Afghanistan, as transition teams will replace brigade combat teams in the long term. We can forecast the number of combat advisors in Afghanistan to grow to the levels we currently see in Iraq—approximately 4,500 advisors—during the next few years. Air Defenders inevitably will participate in this mission at some point throughout their careers, if not already.

Preparing in advance will make you more successful by lessening the steepness of the learning curve once you hit the ground. Combat advisor experience will make us more well-rounded Air Defenders through increased exposure to the rest of our Army and to different (but equally complex) facets of military operations.

For more information on transition team training please visit <http://www.riley.army.mil/units/trainingteam.aspx>.

**Captain Cory N. Scott, Air Defense Artillery (ADA), commands B Company, 1st Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment (B/1-34 AR), in 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, at Fort Riley, Kansas, training deploying teams of combat advisors in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (OEF and OIF). Previously, he was a Staff/Maneuver (S3) Advisor to an Iraqi Army tank battalion in Baghdad. He also served as a Platoon Leader/System Operator for 2-43 ADA, at Fort Bliss, Texas, deploying in support of OEF and OIF. He is a graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point, New York, and holds a Master of Arts in Leadership Studies from the University of Texas at El Paso.**